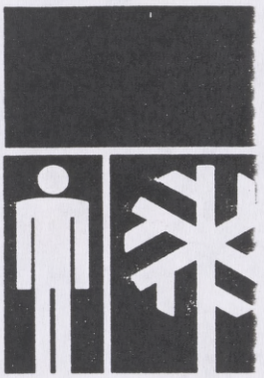
comprehensive management plan

november 1980

SEQUOIA AND KINGS CANYON

MINERAL KING



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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

In accordance with the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.9), an Environmental Assessment of the Comprehensive Management Plan for the Mineral King addition to Sequoia National Park was prepared. The assessment analyzed four alternative strategies, including a preferred alternative, for the management, visitor use, and attendant general development of Mineral King.

The alternatives were generated from a series of public workshops held in April 1979 and from extensive consultations with agencies and individuals interested in Mineral King. The alternatives included (1) no action, (2) retaining the present character and traditional use patterns of the area, (3) returning the Mineral King Valley to pristine conditions, and (4) expanding use opportunities by developing the area as a major year-round attraction. The majority of the comments received on the four alternatives indicated a desire for little or no change to the existing environment. The preferred alternative reflects that attitude by directing only modest change to existing conditions.

The preferred alternative, by retaining the present character and patterns of use at Mineral King, preserves a visitor experience that contrasts with the experience at more highly developed areas. The eventual disposition of permittee cabins and private properties will be governed by the enabling legislation (Public Law 95-625); the preferred alternative directs long-range actions for the use of these properties. The general intent of the long-range plan is to relocate facilities that are inappropriately sited, with respect to both sensitive resources and aesthetic quality, when sufficient land is available.

The Environmental Assessment was published in July 1980 and received extensive public and agency review. Consultations were conducted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California state historic preservation officer. The consultations indicated that the preferred alternative presented no jeopardy to either endangered species or cultural resources. Comments from the public and other agencies were generally favorable. One comment received from the California Department of Fish and Game concerned the impact on the Mineral King deer herd. A current monitoring program should provide further recommendations for mitigating any impact on the deer herd. Two responses received from Congressman Pashayan and the Far West Ski Association concerned the potential for Nordic skiing. Due to significant avalanche activity and the concern for human safety, it was not considered appropriate to encourage additional winter use. Finally, the Mineral King Task Force of the Sierra Club desired an immediate removal of those developments in the subalpine environment of the valley. This action will be undertaken as part of the long-range action plan but could not be accommodated in the short run due to the current lack of suitable terrain for relocating facilities.

Based on the analysis in the Environmental Assessment and the review, the project does not appear to be a major federal action significantly affecting the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared for the Mineral King Comprehensive Management Plan.

The Environmental Assessment is on file and may be viewed at the following offices: Superintendent, Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, Three Rivers, California; and Western Regional Office, National Park Service, San Francisco, California.

Approved:

Howard H. Chapman — Oct. 17, 1980

Regional Director, Western Region — Date

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COMPREHENSIVE MANAGEMENT PLAN

MINERAL KING

SEQUOIA-KINGS CANYON NATIONAL PARKS

CALIFORNIA

2023.009.0325 C

INTRODUCTION

Mineral King was added to Sequoia National Park by passage of the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-625). The intent of Congress was to ensure the preservation of the natural and scenic features of Mineral King for present and future generations and to enhance public enjoyment of the area. One provision of the act required preparation of a comprehensive management plan. Citing specific authorities applicable to the National Park Service in general and Sequoia National Park in particular, Congress recognized that a framework for the management of Mineral King already existed. The remaining concerns related principally to questions of visitor use. Therefore, the focus of the planning effort has been to examine various types and levels of recreational opportunities that could be offered in the area consistent with sound environmental practices.

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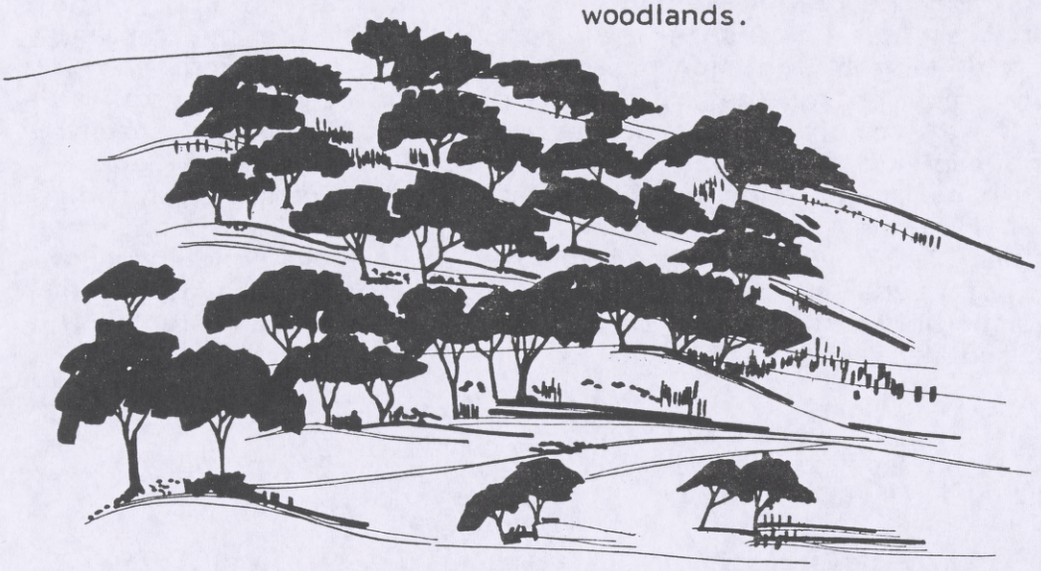
A visit to Mineral King takes visitors through the full range of Sierran environments. The trip begins in the foothills of the southern Sierra, an area of chaparral-covered hillsides and scattered oak woodlands.



Following the road as it climbs in elevation, visitors gradually enter a forest environment dominated by the giant sequoias of the Atwell Mill grove. Summer cabins, rustic lodges, eating places, and campgrounds provide accommodations for a leisurely stay in this forested recreational setting.

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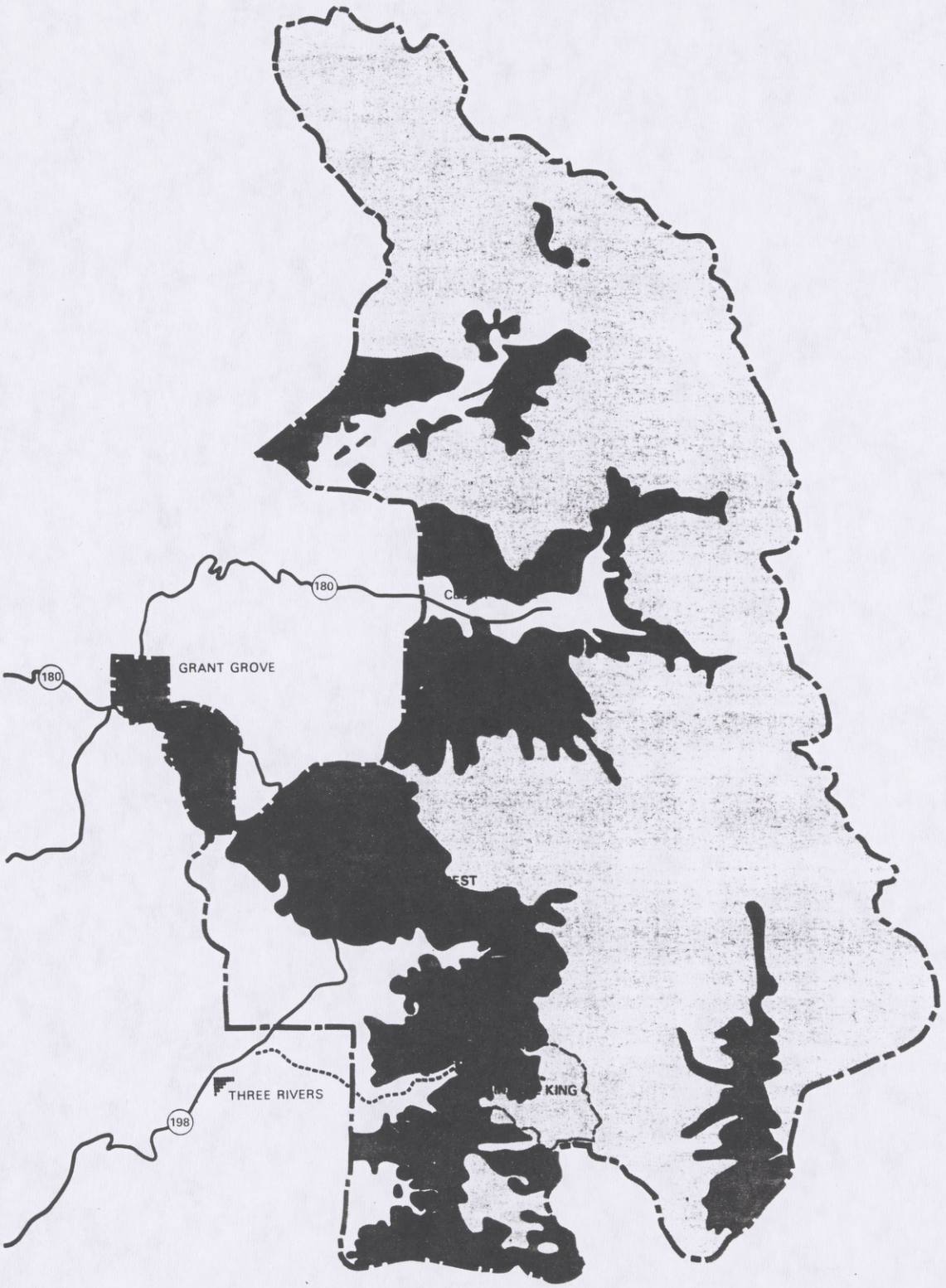

ALPINE

CONIFER

SEQUOIA GROVE

OAK WOODLAND / CHAPARRAL

ENVIRONMENT

MINERAL KING

SEQUOIA / KINGS CANYON NATIONAL PARKS / CALIFORNIA

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR / NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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DSC	APR 80

NORTH

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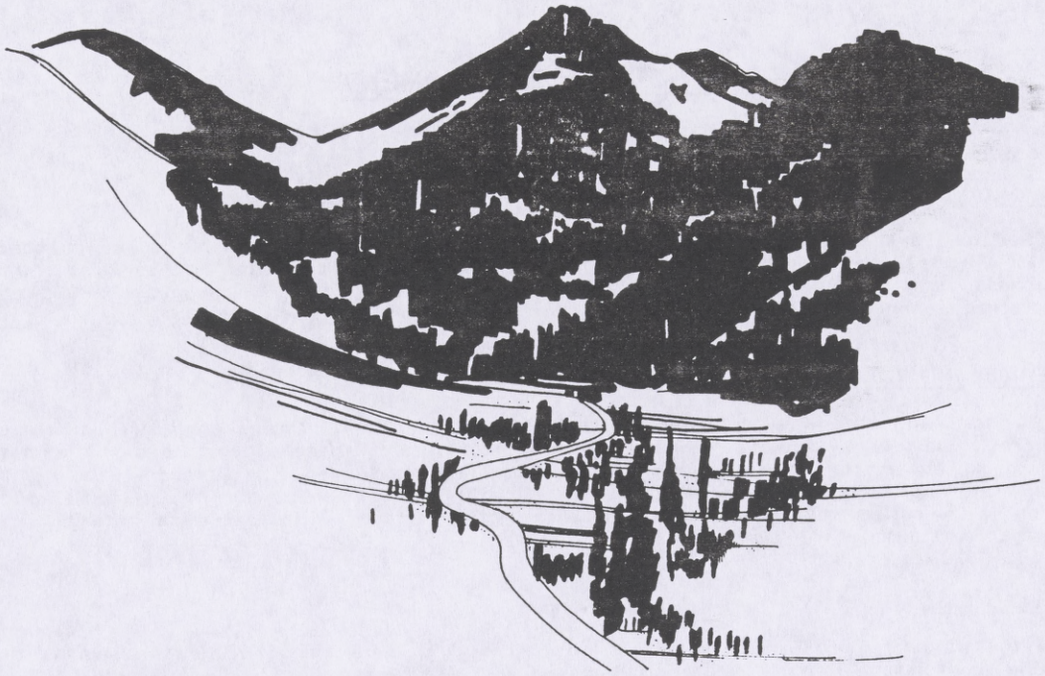

Still climbing, the road emerges from the forest canopy into the panoramic landscape of an open alpine valley enhanced by vistas of rugged mountain peaks and rushing high-country streams. This is the destination of most visitors, who come to hike, backpack, and ride horses into the backcountry, or simply to enjoy the alpine environment from the roadside.

THE INTENT OF THIS PLAN

Mineral King offers many of the scenic attractions and natural features scattered throughout other areas of the Sierra Nevada. The availability of a variety of environments seemingly presents an ideal situation for visitor use. However, Mineral King is a relatively small area of compact forms, and this scale imposes a constraint on planning for visitor activities.

The objective for Mineral King is to provide an alternative experience for park visitors, in contrast to the experience offered at more highly developed areas of Sequoia and Kings Canyon. The actions detailed in this plan are intended to maintain the current pattern, density, and level of public use--both in summer and in winter--and to retain the traditional character of Mineral King.

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GENERAL DEVELOPMENT

HAMMOND

The National Park Service will seek authority to construct a visitor contact station at Hammond. This facility will be used to inform visitors about the availability of campsites and services and to issue wilderness permits. Operation of this facility will allow for a reduction in onsite NPS personnel in other areas of Mineral King and will provide some control over traffic on the road.

MINERAL KING ROAD

The Mineral King road was originally constructed in 1879, and it remains engineered to standards of that era. Short of a complete reconstruction and realignment, there appears to be little that can be done to improve access. Such action is not recommended; consequently, the road will be maintained at its existing standard and capacity. The only improvements will be for the purpose of reducing erosion. The unpaved portions of the road will be surfaced with a suitable material, and minor drainage improvements will be made.

ATWELL MILL

While the National Park Service is committed to reducing development within the sequoia groves, a suitable environment for the relocation of the Atwell Mill campground is not available at the present time. Therefore, the campground will remain in its present location for the lifetime of this plan.

CABIN COVE

No actions are proposed for this area. Permit cabins will remain for the lifetime of the owner of record.

SILVER CITY

Actions proposed for Silver City are directed toward maintaining the character of the area and the types of uses that occur there, including a moderate amount of accommodations and visitor services. Specific actions will include replacing NPS trailers with architecturally compatible housing, initiating a revegetation program, defining circulation routes, and maintaining visitor services and accommodations at existing levels.

FACULTY FLAT

Faculty Flat will be managed as a threshold to the alpine environment. Activities occurring in this area will remain. Specific actions will include replacing the ranger station in its present location and expanding the Coldspring campground. The new ranger station will be used to provide information and orientation services, and it will also allow for the collection and display of artifacts relating to the historical periods of Mineral King. It is recommended that existing campsites in the Coldspring campground be rehabilitated and that 12 new sites be added in the vicinity of Mosquito Creek. This will provide management with the option of designating individual campsites for short-term use by backpackers, and provide sufficient additional spaces to satisfy peak demand. Permit cabins will remain for the lifetime of the owner of record.

THE VALLEY

The addition of Mineral King Valley to Sequoia and Kings Canyon parks offers for the first time an easily accessible alpine environment for visitor use. The valley will be managed as the outstanding natural feature of the Mineral King study area. Due to inherent environmental factors, including avalanche hazards, sensitive deer fawning areas, and aesthetic value, it is the conclusion of the planning effort that the valley should be kept free of new development. Existing trails will be used to create an interpretive loop trail that will extend from Faculty Flat to points of interest in the valley. Use of existing parking areas will be controlled so as not to exceed the 200-car capacity. Permit cabins will remain for the lifetime of the owner of record. The pack station will remain in its present location.

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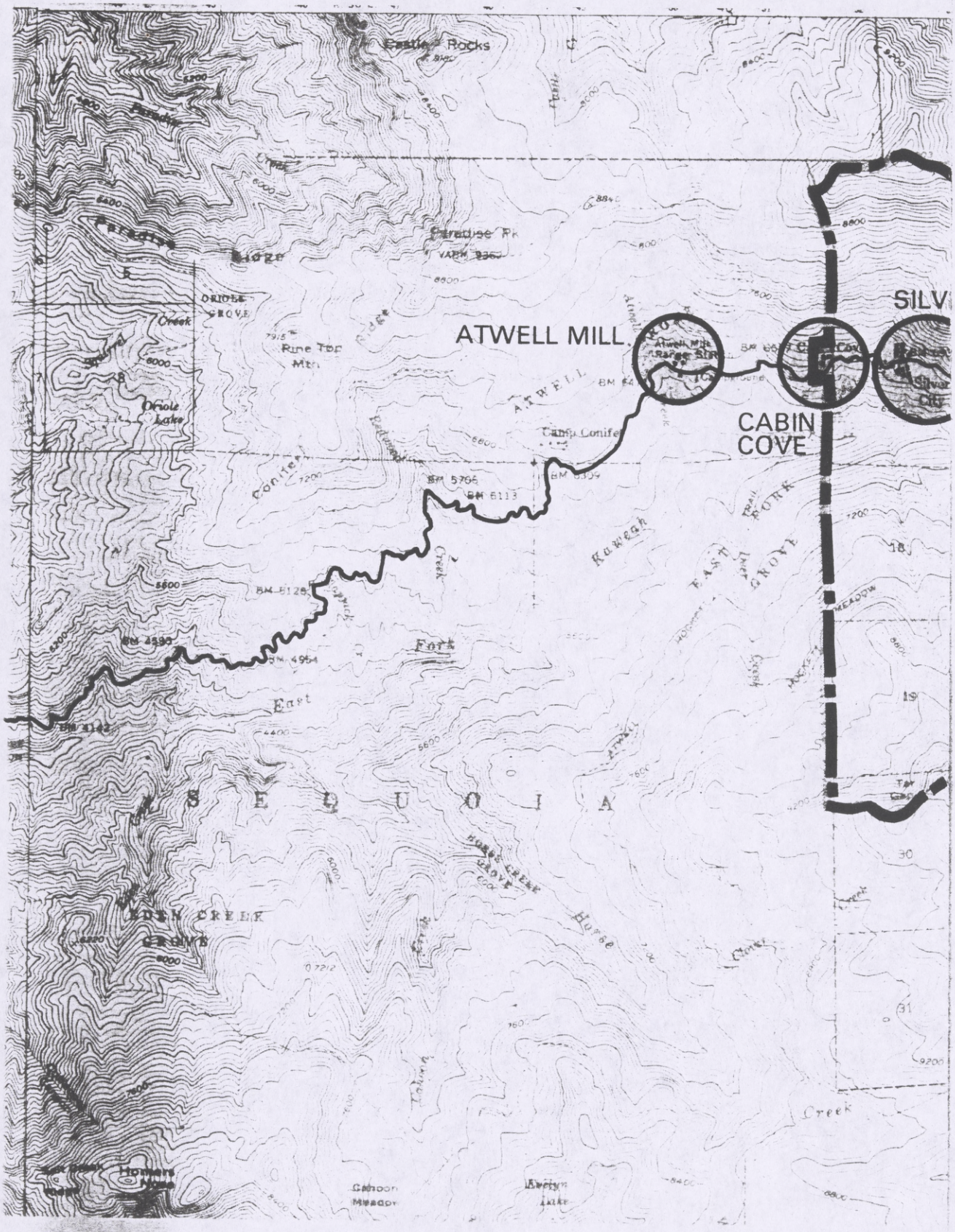

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PLANNING UNITS

MINERAL KING

SEQUOIA / KINGS CANYON NATIONAL PARKS / CALIFORNIA

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR / NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

102	40079A
DSC	APR 80

NORTH

0 1 Kilometer

0 1 Mile

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BACKCOUNTRY USE

Mineral King has long functioned as a staging area for access to the backcountry of Sequoia National Park and adjacent Sequoia National Forest. Use of the backcountry will be held to a daily quota consistent with trail capacities and the stability of the backcountry ecosystem.

INTERPRETATION

Interpretation at Mineral King will focus on the subalpine and alpine ecosystems, since those environments are not generally accessible for onsite interpretation in the remainder of Sequoia and Kings Canyon. Related subthemes include other aspects of the natural environment and the rich and varied human history of Mineral King. Aside from the facility proposed at the Faculty Flat ranger station, the interpretive program will rely on personal services rather than facility development.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

As a district within Sequoia National Park, Mineral King is subject to the resource management goals and objectives developed and approved in the Natural Resources Management Plan for the park. Many of the objectives of that plan are relevant to management of resources at Mineral King, including the management of vegetation, fire, wildlife, and aquatic resources. However, certain resources need to be given special consideration independent of the park's management plan. These include the Mineral King deer herd and four alpine lakes that have been dammed. Transferring the area from the administration of the U.S. Forest Service to the National Park Service precluded hunting. As a result, a program has been initiated with the cooperation of the California Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Forest Service to monitor the population dynamics of the deer herd in the absence of hunting. This analysis will continue, requiring continued consultation with the California Department of Fish and Game. The management strategy will be dependent on the data produced by the monitoring program. Regarding the dammed lakes, it is recommended that no action be taken. A significant impact is not caused by retaining the dams; therefore, they should continue to function to ensure a dry season water flow for the purposes of power generation downstream.

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WILDERNESS

It is apparent from the development actions that lands above 8,000 feet elevation could qualify for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Following completion of the management plan, the steps necessary to seek legislation for formal wilderness designation will be initiated. In the interim, the lands above 8,000 feet will be managed to ensure the preservation of their inherent wilderness values.

LAND ACQUISITION AND PERMITTEE PROPERTIES

Acquisition of private property and the eventual disposition of permit cabins will be carried out in accordance with the policies prescribed by Congress in the authorizing legislation. Basically, private property will be acquired as funds become available, and retained use and occupancy reservations will be granted at the discretion of the owners. Permit cabins will remain for the lifetime of the owner of record.

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A PROPOSAL FOR THE FUTURE

Since public attitudes regarding the use of park lands are continuously changing, plans normally provide direction for only a specified period of time, typically 10 to 15 years. The preceding plan serves that function. However, the principles established in the enabling legislation require that some consideration be given to the future use of acquired properties and the disposition of permit cabins once these permits expire.

The National Park Service is committed to the long-term goal of eventually removing development from environmentally sensitive areas and consolidating all visitor services and support facilities at Faculty Flat and Silver City. Silver City will continue to offer commercial services and overnight accommodations as appropriate. It will also serve as the NPS administrative, housing, and maintenance center, and as acquisition of private properties proceeds, buildings acquired at Silver City may be adaptively used for these functions.

Faculty Flat will continue to serve as the threshold for the valley with facilities for information and orientation, camping, trailhead parking, and a pack station. When additional developable land becomes available at Faculty Flat, the campground at Atwell Mill and the parking and pack station in the valley will be relocated to this area.

All of the cabins at Cabin Cove and in the valley will be removed when their permits expire. Eventually, these areas and Atwell Mill will be restored to natural conditions.

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CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION WITH OTHERS

Public involvement has been an important part of this project. During the review of the planning alternatives, the public responded overwhelmingly in favor of retaining the traditional character of Mineral King. The plan will carry out this intent.

As directed by the legislation that included Mineral King in Sequoia National Park, the National Park Service has consulted with the California Department of Fish and Game throughout this planning project regarding proposals for management of wildlife (see Resource Management section). In addition, the National Park Service has consulted with the U.S. Forest Service, Southern California Edison, Native Americans, Mineral King Homeowners Association, and conservation organizations regarding the issues that concern these groups.

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PUBLIC LAW 95-625—NOV. 10, 1978

ADDITION OF MINERAL KING VALLEY TO SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARK

16 USC 45f.

SEC. 314. (a) It is the purpose of this section to—

(1) assure the preservation for this and future generations of the outstanding natural and scenic features of the area commonly known as the Mineral King Valley and previously designated as the Sequoia National Game Refuge; and

(2) enhance the ecological values and public enjoyment of such area by adding such area to the Sequoia National Park.

(b) (1) In order to add to the Sequoia National Park (hereinafter in this section referred to as the "park") a certain area known as Mineral King Valley possessing unique natural and scenic values, there is hereby established as part of such park all lands, waters, and interests therein, constituting approximately sixteen thousand two hundred acres designated before the date of the enactment of this Act as the Sequoia National Game Refuge and as depicted on the drawing entitled "Boundary Map, Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park", numbered 102-90,000 and dated April 1975. A copy of such drawing shall be on file and available for public inspection in the office of the Director, National Park Service, Department of the Interior. After advising the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs of the United States House of Representatives and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the United States Senate in writing, the Secretary is authorized to make minor revisions of the boundaries of the park when necessary by publication of a revised drawing or other boundary description in the Federal Register.

Drawing copy, availability.

Boundary revisions, publication in Federal Register and advisement to congressional committees.

(2) The Sequoia National Game Refuge is hereby abolished and the Secretary of Agriculture shall transfer, without consideration, to the administrative jurisdiction of the Secretary, the area constituting such refuge, and any unexpended funds available for purposes of management of the refuge shall be available for purposes of management of the park.

Sequoia National Game Refuge, abolition.

(c) (1) Within the boundaries of the area added to the park pursuant to this section, the Secretary may acquire lands and interests in lands by donation, purchase with donated or appropriated funds, exchange, or transfer from other Federal departments or agencies.

Lands and interests, acquisitions.

(2) Where the private use of any property acquired pursuant to this subsection would, in the judgment of the Secretary, be compatible with the purposes of this section, the Secretary may, as a condition of such acquisition, permit the owner or owners of such property to retain for themselves and their successors or assigns rights of use and occupancy. Such rights of use and occupancy shall be for not more than twenty-five years or for a term ending at the death of the owner or his or her spouse, whichever is later. The owner shall reserve such rights and elect the term to be reserved on the date of acquisition of the property. Except for so much of the property as is donated, the Secretary shall pay to the owner the fair market value of the property on the date of its acquisition, less the fair market value on that date of the right retained by the owner.

Use and occupancy rights, retention.

Fair market value.

(3) A right of use and occupancy retained pursuant to paragraph (2) may be terminated by the Secretary upon his determination that the property or any portion thereof is being used in a manner which is incompatible with the purposes of this section. Such right shall terminate by operation of law upon notification by the Secretary to the holder of the right of such determination and tendering to him the amount equal to the fair market value of that portion which remains unexpired as of the date of such tender. In the case of any property which was used for noncommercial purposes during the ten calendar years immediately preceding the enactment of this Act, the commercial use of such property subsequent to the enactment of this Act shall be treated as incompatible with the purposes of this section. In the case of any property which was used for commercial purposes at any time during the ten calendar years immediately preceding the enactment of this Act, any substantial change or expansion of such commercial use subsequent to the enactment of this Act without the express approval of the Secretary shall be treated as incompatible with such purposes.

Termination, notification.

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(4) In exercising his authority to acquire property under this section, the Secretary shall give prompt and careful consideration to any offer made by an individual owning property within the park to sell such property if such individual notifies the Secretary that the continued ownership of such property is causing, or would result in, undue hardship. Nothing in this section, or in any other provision of law, shall prevent the Secretary from exercising his authority to acquire property referred to in this subsection at any time after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(5) If any individual tract or parcel of land acquired is partly inside and partly outside the boundaries of the park the Secretary may, in order to minimize the payment of severance damages, acquire the whole of the tract or parcel.

Area acquisition.

(6) If the management plan prepared under subsection (e) provides for improved access to the area added to the park under this section, the Secretary is authorized to acquire, by donation, purchase with donated or appropriated funds, exchange or transfer from other Federal departments or agencies, the area comprising the road from State Route 198 to, and within, the Mineral King Valley together with a right-of-way for such road of a width sufficient to include improvements to the road and all bridges, ditches, cuts, and fills appurtenant thereto, but not exceeding a maximum average width of two hundred feet. Property acquired from the State or any political subdivision thereof may be acquired by donation only. With regard to routes of access to and within the Mineral King Valley, the Secretary shall take such measures as are necessary to protect against the effects of siltation on the ecosystem of the park.

Report to congressional committees.

(7) The Secretary shall report to the committees of the Congress named in subsection (b)(1) the action taken by him pursuant to this subsection. Such report shall contain information sufficient to inform such committees of—

(A) the acquisitions made by him pursuant to this subsection during the period covered by such report;

(B) his reasons why all of such property authorized to be acquired and not so acquired as of the date of such report, if any, have not been acquired; and

(C) his schedule of a timetable for the acquisition of such property referred to in subparagraph (B).

Such report shall be submitted before the expiration of the second fiscal year beginning after the date on which the comprehensive management plan is submitted to the committees of Congress pursuant to subsection (e).

Administration.

(d)(1) The area added to the park by this section shall be administered in accordance with this section and the provisions of law generally applicable to units of the National Park System including the Act of August 25, 1916 (39 Stat. 535; 16 U.S.C. and following) and the Act of September 25, 1890 (26 Stat. 478; 16 U.S.C. 41 and following). Any other statutory authority available to the Secretary for the conservation and management of wildlife, wildlife habitat, and natural resources may be utilized to the extent he finds such authority will further the purposes of this section.

(2)(A) Except in the case of a lease or permit which the Secretary determines to be incompatible with the administration of the park pursuant to this section, any lease or permit on Federal land within the area added to the park under this section which is in effect immediately before the enactment of this Act shall continue in effect pursuant to its terms and conditions following the expansion of the park under this section.

Leases or permits, renewals or extensions, review.

(B) In the case of a lease or permit which is continued under subparagraph (A), upon notice to the Secretary by the lessee or permittee of his intention to seek renewal or extension of such lease or permit, the lease or permit shall be reviewed by the Secretary, and may be renewed or extended for an additional period of five years. Any such lease or permit shall be reviewed at the end of such renewal or extension period and may also be renewed or extended in the same manner for additional five-year periods thereafter. Any renewals or extensions of leases or permits shall be granted only to those persons who were

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lessees or permittees of record on the date of enactment of this Act, and any such lease or permit shall provide that the lease or permit may be terminated by the Secretary at any time if the Secretary determines that such lease or permit is incompatible with the administration of the park pursuant to this section or that the land is needed for park purposes.

(3) The Act of December 14, 1974 (88 Stat. 1660) is amended by inserting the following new section after section 4:

16 USC 45a-1 note.

"SEC. 5. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, any federally owned lands incorporated within the boundaries of Sequoia National Park subsequent to the date of enactment of this Act, which entail project works, developments, lands, or facilities which are components of Federal Power Commission Project Numbered 298, shall be subject to all provisions of this Act.".

Comprehensive management, plan, submittal to congressional committees. 16 USC 45f.

(e)(1) Within two years from the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary, in cooperation with the State of California, shall develop and submit to the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs of the United States House of Representatives and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the United States Senate, a comprehensive management plan for the area added to the park under this section. In the preparation of such plan, the Secretary shall give appropriate consideration to the need for the development of additional recreational opportunities and other public uses which are consistent with sound environmental management of the area and the policies of the National Park Service.

Public participation.

(2)(A) In preparing the comprehensive management plan required by this subsection and in preparing any subsequent revision of such plan, the Secretary shall provide for full public participation and shall consider the comments and views of all interested agencies, organizations, and individuals.

(B) For purposes of insuring such full public participation, the Secretary shall provide reasonable advance notice to State and local governments, interested Federal agencies, private organizations, and the general public of hearings, workshops, meetings, and other opportunities available for such participation. Such notice shall be published in newspapers of general circulation in the localities affected by the development and management of the park, published in the Federal Register, and communicated by other appropriate means. The Western Regional Advisory Committee of the National Park Service (or a subcommittee thereof) shall also be utilized for purposes of facilitating public involvement.

Advance notice, publication in Federal Register and newspapers.

Cooperation.

(C) The Secretaries or Directors of all Federal departments, agencies, and commissions having a relevant expertise are hereby authorized and directed to cooperate with the Secretary in his development of such plan and to make such studies as the Secretary may request on a cost reimbursable basis.

(D) In preparing the comprehensive management plan required by this subsection, the Secretary shall consider technical information and other pertinent data assembled or produced by field studies or investigations conducted separately or jointly by the technical and administrative personnel of the Federal and State agencies involved in order to insure the permanent conservation of wildlife within the area added to the park by this section. Except in emergencies, rules and regulations pertaining to the management of wildlife within the area added to the park by this section shall be put into effect only after consultation with the State of California.

Consultation.

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(f) There are hereby authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary for the acquisition of land and interests therein described in this section. Appropriation authorization.

(g) Effective upon the transfer referred to in subsection (b)(2), Public Law 85-648 (72 Stat. 604; 16 U.S.C. 45a-3) and section 6 of the Act of July 3, 1926 (44 Stat. 821; 16 U.S.C. 688) are hereby repealed. The repeal of such section 6 shall not be construed to prohibit or prevent the Secretary from exercising any authority applicable to the national parks respecting the protection of birds, game, or other wild animals. Repeals. 16 USC 688 note.

(h) The Congress recognizes that the Mineral King Valley area has outstanding potential for certain year-round recreational opportunities, but the development of permanent facilities for downhill skiing within the area would be inconsistent with the preservation and enhancement of its ecological values. Skiing. 16 USC 45f.

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As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities to protect and conserve our land and water, energy and minerals, fish and wildlife, parks and recreation areas, and to ensure the wise use of all these resources. The department also has major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

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